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ABSTRACT

This guide, which is geared toward faculty at institutions of higher education that are in the process of developing a program for working adults in a community with a strong unionized working force, presents guidelines for establishing and developing a working relationship with a labor advisory board. The rationale behind establishing such a board is discussed. Next, guidelines are set forth for contacting potential advisory board members. Principles of organizing an advisory board are outlined. Criteria for selecting an individual to serve as the executive of the advisory board are examined. The various functions of a union advisory board are described. The final section contains 10 political principles that should be observed when establishing and working with a union advisory board. (MN)

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LEAS

LABOR ADVISORY BOARDS FOR WORKERS' EDUCATION PROGRAMS

This is one of a series of topical issue papers commissioned by the Labor Education Advisory Services program. Donald D. St. Clair, the author of this paper is Director of the Program for Adult College Education (PACE) at Longview Community College, Kansas City, Missouri, and an active member of the American Federation of Teachers

FORWARD

The following remarks contain the basic information that anyone starting a workers' education program should have in order to work effectively with labor. I am assuming that individuals involved as directors or union coordinators will either know or take the trouble to find out how organized labor is structured into international and national offices, regional territories, state organizations, districts, city united labor councils, craft councils, CAP, COPE and DRIVE orgainzations, and city union locals. I am assuming that common sense will dictate that you start on the national or international level and work down.

The ideas, principles and observations are a distillation of my personal experience and ideas acquired in workshops. Of particular significance was the Buffalo State College University PACE workshop held in April, 1979. I either attended or gathered the notes taken from all sessions in the Buffalo Workshop. Since that time I have "lived, eaten, slept and dreamed" PACE. I am particularly indebted to John Aiken and Richard Sneddon for many of the ideas and thoughts contained in this paper. April of 1979 seems like ten years ago and I have forgotten which, what, and how much is due to Aiken, Sneddon or St. Clair. All I really know is this: I wouldn't have been able to do what I did without the Buffalo Workshop and the common-sense wisdom of John Aiken and Dick Sneddon.

I can tell you one thing for certain. These principles work. I would even go so far as to say that some of them should be memorized, in particular the last ten points listed (which I refer to as the Aiken-Sneddon Ten Commandments of Union Work). The essay is brief for the task outlined by it. Many

of the points made will have to be carefully thought out in application. Some of the points are so briefly put, I fear that many will dismiss them as unimportant. The brevity of the idea is no measure of the value I place on it; it's simply an idea that can be clearly stated in an uncomplicated way.

INTRODUCTION

As any institution of higher education begins to develop a program for working adults in a community with a strong unionized working force, a Labor Advisory Board should be set up at the earliest possible date. The Advisory Board has many functions. Any program without such a board is liable to eventually come to grief if, indeed, it gets off the ground at all. This short paper is intended to outline the basic structure, nature, function and rationale for Advisory Boards. I will start with the latter.

THE RATIONALE

First of all, there is an age-old antagonism between intellectuals and working people. An old yet still contemporary statement of this is to be found in Aristophane's satirical attack upon Socrates and his "Thinking Factory." Strepsides or "Twister," loaded down with taxes, bills, a worthless, lazy son and a spendthrift wife, decides that he must become an "educated crook." This horny-handed working man goes to the "Thinking Factory" to acquire verbal, legal and rhetorical skills which he hopes will make it possible for him to survive and get rich. Socrates' palefaced disciples attempt to instantly transform him into an intellectual. They cover his suntanned face with flour to give him a sickly, pasty look of an intellectual. They attempt to teach him precious habits and effeminate personal mannerisms. In the end, the angered "Twister" burns down the "Thinking Factory."

Attitudes have changed very little. The horny-handed man of today, like "Twister," carries deep suspicions of intellectuals. Intellectuals have contempt for working people and often refer to them as "Rednecks." Intellectuals see themselves as "professionals" and even though they may be organized in the AFT, they often see themselves as a breed apart, as superior and special people. For the most part the inteligensia of America have used their knowledge to further their own self-interest or to exploit the working class. In general, it has been the exceptional intellectual that has used knowledge to champion the interests of the working class. Also intelligensia may wish to "protect" their knowledge from dilution by the uninformed and unworthy. They protect themselves and their own position from assault or competition from below.

Moreover, the union leadership has long been accustomed to being used by virtually everyone. Every charitable agency asks them for donations. Mayors ask them to pass bond issues and tax increases. School boards, chancellors and presidents solicit their support for levies and favorable legislation. It is a rare monthly executive board meeting in the major locals in which numerous requests for money, time, and support are not heard. Union Presidents, Business Managers and Executive Boards are accustomed to endless needy causes and people standing at their doors with their hands out. Too often, those who ask and who receive help have made little attempt to give anything to the union in return. Very often just the reverse happens; the union ensures passage of a bond issue and the school repays them by letting out a bid to a non-union company.

Colleges organizing a workers' education program must overcome these past behaviors. There's an old saying in union circles, "Open the door and the rats get in." Outsiders are not trusted. In many union circles, even the AFT will not be perceived as a bonafide member of the union family despite its

membership in the AFL-CIO.

The workers' education program coordinator who contacts the unions must overcome these barriers, convince the union officers and rank and file that they are serious about a program that will serve working people and that the program will not only help individuals but promote the labor movement, bring prestige to it, and equip members to combat anti-union propaganda and attacks. More will be said about this coordinator later. At this point, let it be observed that the union coordinator functions as the living symbol of the program. If he or she is accepted as a "brother" or "sister" in the labor movement, the program will get started.

With these background comments, let me make the following points:

1. Contact key labor leaders as soon as possible. Indicate that a program is being developed by pro-labor, labor-oriented teachers. Indicate that the college administration is open to such a program because of declining enrollments. Admit that teachers will work hard for the program because it will save jobs. Union leaders will not believe that you're doing the program out of the goodness of your heart. If you try to convince them that your motives are purely idealistic and altruistic, they are liable to dismiss you as a liar, a lunatic, or both.

2. Present your credentials. Most important here are "labor credentials" which should ideally include faculty union membership, any former membership in AFL-CIO, Teamster, or UAW locals, your personal academic background as it relates to your interest in the labor movement. (No one will be impressed by a mere list of academic honors and degrees. In fact, you should minimize these). Endorsement letters should be presented from international representatives of all the major unions. Background material containing success stories of existing worker programs will complete your "credentials."

3. Outline a brief, concise, tentative curriculum and sell it as if you believe in it. Write it in clear simple language and avoid education's jargon.

4. Ask for their guidance in forming an Advisory Board. Let them tell you how it should be done, when it's to be done, and who is to contact whom.

5. Indicate that the Advisory Board should contain a nonpartisan group of legislators, no fewer than two Democrats and two

Republicans. Let labor pick the legislators. Have them call the legislators and ask them to serve. After this has happened, you can call the legislator, make a presentation, and visit with the congressman or senator about the program.

It is very important the legislators serve on the Advisory Borad. Labor leaders by themselves have little power to influence boards of trustees, university regents or college administrations. However, legislators have great power and influence over college and university policy decisions; every year legislators appropriate money for education. Every year, on the state level, legislators make monetary decisions which result in feast or famine on the campus level. Unions representing tens of thousands or registered voters in every major industry, combined with legislators that appropriate money for the colleges, provide the program a power base without equal on any campus. It is so effective that it can be said that this Advisory Board can become a more effective lobbying tool for the college than any other yet devised for colleges or universities. It works this way: Organized labor asks the legislators for support, rather than a representative of education asking legislators for support, money, or favorable legislation. The legislator delivers the favor to labor. Both labor and the college are beneficiaries. Generally, legislators are willing to give additional money to education, but they fear the consequences at the polls from their constituency. However, when the request comes from the constituency, they are happy to deliver. Education is one of the safe things the legislator can deliver to labor without trouble from other constituencies.

6. In establishing the Advisory Board, you should make sure that you point out the following:

   a. You want labor to assist in constructing the curriculum and courses.

   b. Your want the Advisory Board to function as the eyes, ears, and conscience of the program.

   c. If any course or teacher is not working out, or is a cause

for concern, you want to know immediately so that adjustments or changes can be made.

d. You want an ongoing labor body to evaluate the program, assess its weaknesses and strengths and make recommendations for change.

A word of caution should be introduced at this point. Without exception, union leaders will value and desire education. You must keep in mind that you must translate this respect into a specific curriculum and specific courses. You must, in some instances, sell a liberal arts program. The best way to "sell" history and the social sciences is to point out that this is the only way the rank and file will get the facts. You may suggest that had such a program been in place, the estimated 45 per cent of the rank and file would not have voted for Reagan. Philosophy courses are easy to sell. They equip union people to outthink and out-argue anti-union friends and acquaintances.

Do not go into a meeting with union people and say, "You tell me what you want and I'll give it to you." Provide instead a foundation program and suggested curriculum and support it with clear, concise and understandable reasons. If you suggest that you'll do anything, you'll most likely be interpreted as someone trying to "fill seats" and use the union to create a job for yourself.

STRUCTURE

The Advisory Board could be of any size. The number of members would be determined partially by the interest that can be generated in the labor community. As much as possible, a broad cross-section of unions should be selected. One should not ignore or neglect the more wealthy building and construction locals; they may not put many students in the program, but they carry the greatest political clout at many state levels and influence decisions

made by local labor councils and federations.

In most cities, the Advisory Board should include the names of 25 to 30 key labor leaders, including the UAW and the Teamsters. Some names will be included for political reasons; that is, the union leader will lend his or her name to the effort, but will not attend meetings. Expect this and don't get upset if they don't attend. Out of this group will emerge a core of activists that will work hard for the program. After a couple of years, some names should be dropped (with the consent and advice of the Board members) and others added.

Once the Board is picked, a meeting should be called. At this meeting, the program should be briefly reviewed and the duties of the Board outlined and officers elected. A President, Vice-Preseident, and Recording Secretary should be elected. The Union Coordinator, the man or woman putting this group together, should act as the Executive Secretary. For the most part the Executive Secretary will conduct most of the key business of the Advisory Board. In some instances a member of the Board may wish to do it, but that is unlikely. The union officers are extremely busy; they will expect the Coordinator to do most of the work, to talk with authority, and to speak plainly and frankly about what he wants and needs.

Beyond this, special action committees may be set up, headed by members of the Advisory Board. These might include a Curriculum Committee to make recommendations for additions and changes to the curriculum; a Tuition Remission; and Scholarship Committee to generate monies for poor families' tuition; and a Social Action Committee to gain broad support and visibility for the program.

General meetings should be kept to a minimum, no more than three times per year -- one in the fall, one in the winter and one in early summer.

Emergency meetings can be called any time. Advisory Board members should be kept informed in between meetings by periodic newsletters, phone calls and personal contacts. There are some general rules you should keep in mind:

1. Don't waste busy union officers' time be calling meetings that are unnecessary.

2. Keep everybody informed of everything. There must be no surprises. When in doubt, write a memo or newsletter. Unions survive on trust and good faith. Keep everything open, straightforward and hide nothing. Always do what you promise or explain why you were not able to fulfill you obligation.

3. Keep key members of the Board actively involved. Otherwise, the Board may fall apart and no one will attend meetings.

4. Union Advisory Boards can never be rubber-stamp boards. The members are important people with great political power.

    a. If they have problems with a teacher, a course, or anything in the program, make the changes they suggest or have a good reason why you cannot.

    b. If they ask for a program or favor, do it. Do it promptly. If you can't deliver, tell them you can't and tell them why.

At this point you should start putting together local and state endorsements of the program. As the program develops, virtually every labor-endorsed local, state, and federal congressman, senator, mayor, civic leader, governor, etc., will write endorsement letters at the request of the union. A funding proposal is an ideal method of getting these endorsements written. There are other ways of obtaining these, but they are too lengthy to go into here.

Do not hold back any information, particularly in problem areas or areas where you're experiencing political opposition. Someone on your Board knows someone or knows someone who knows someone who can take care of your problem. Trust them. Troubles they uderstand, and getting things done is for them an art form.

THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE ADVISORY BOARD

When a program is developed, careful consideration should be given to the

selection of the man or woman that shall serve as the Executive Secretary. That person should preferably be a member of the campus union and have been formerly a member in one of the larger, nonteaching unions. That person must have legitimate pro-labor ideas and values, as well as a personality to which union people can relate.

There is a wide range of personality types that could work well with labor. Some people can work better than others and some can be totally ineffectual. No one selected by the campus group will be officially rejected. Union officers are seldom openly rude to a person; they may be hostile to a proposal but never to a person who is a potential friend to labor -- no matter how eccentric or perverse that person may be. They will be polite, they will listen politely, they will agree and they will thank the person representing the college profusely but nothing may happen if they don't like or trust the person.

It is even possible that the union people will agree to serve on an Advisory Board, attend a meeting or so, and still nothing will happen. In general, the following can be observed:

1. The person selected should be an astute politician and very perceptive in interpersonal relationships.

2. The person should dress well and be capable of a distinguished professional appearance. He should be able to pass for a lawyer or an aggressive business executive.

3. At the same time, he must be "street-wise," talk the languages of the street and understand the politics of street survival.

4. He must communicate personal strength and courage. Union people respect a sense of pride and honor. Weak people who break under pressure have lost strikes and have gotten unions into trouble. They instinctively recoil from weakness and indecisiveness.

5. The Executive Secretary should be a combination of a missionary, a salesman, a true believer and an intellectual in the best sense of the word.

6. This person must be a workaholic and willing to go to every place labor people show up. To organize effectively the task

must, at least temporarily, take over one's life.

FUNCTION

A well constructed Union Advisory Borad will almost assure that a program succeeds. Its existence, however, is a necessary but not a sufficient reason for your success. The Board does many things for the program. Many of the real functions of the Board have been described in the section on the rationale and the structure of the Board. Beyond what's been mentioned, the Board has these functions:

1. It assures the labor community of some control over the program.
2. It informs the key labor leaders of the activities and progress of the program.
3. It opens doors for the program and makes the program legitimate.
4. It will guard and protect the program from attacks and, in some instances, result in the program's being given priority over other programs on campus.

UNION POLITICS

It must be remembered that an Advisory Board is but one small part of the work required in putting a program in place and making it work. The union locals must be constantly serviced and consulted. Without an understanding of the broader picture of union politics, you may make fatal mistakes. Union politics are extremely complex and complicated. For example, asking what the unions "want" is like asking what the human race wants. They want everything and they fear everything; in other words, the goals, wishes, ambitions, and problems vary from union to union. Moreover, union politics are basically tribal politics; each local has a chief, a warrior caste, a more-or-less well defined turf, a network of alliances with other chiefs in a hierarchy of interlocking pyramids of power.

If you are an astute observer and a good listener, you may begin to figure out these shifting, fluid alliances after a year or so of involvement. No one in the labor movement is going to draw you a road map. They will tell you what to do and what not to do. Don't ask why; they have a reason and they will tell you if you need to know. If they don't tell you, you're probably better off not knowing. Generally, you should be cautious and wary of anyone who, after one or two meetings, begins to give you the "inside story" on union politics. They either don't know what they're talking about or they have an axe to grind which is not shared by many union people.

In order to set up a strong advisory board and be effective in the locals in your community, a number of political principles should be observed:

1. You must understand the hierarchy of power in the structure you are approaching. Know who has the real power. The best way to find out initially is to ask, "Who's the man who can make the decision?" Listen to everything, retain names and offices. Get information down on paper.

   a. Talk to all links in the chain.

   b. Each president or business manager of each local is autonomous You must talk to each one.

   c. Before getting a local participating with an on-site class, you may have to make as many as four trips and four presentations at this local -- first to the person who has the greatest power (the President or Business Manager); then to the Executive Board; to the Educational Officer and finally the membership.

   d. Don't expect a large number of students to sign up for classes the first time they hear about the program. If a few are willing to try and have a positive experience, they will spread the work to their friends and enrollments will build in the following semesters.

2. You must instill confidence and trust in the union. Then do the same with state representatives and the state political structure. They must know you are secure and a solid labor person.

3. Deliver what you promise. Union people respect actions. Establish yourself as a "man of your word." When asked a favor, don't hesitate. Decide. Be firm and reply, "You got it"; "I'll do it"; or "I'll get it done." If you can't do it, say so.

4. Understand the "chit" system. When you ask a favor, they will ask and expect one in return. If you do them a favor, they will return it. Don't ask why; they'll tell you if you need to know. Universities, of course, often operate differently. Unlearn your academic ways. Make decisions. If labor wants a history written, write it or talk someone else into writing it. Get it done.

Think of the "chit" system as similar to the relationship you might have with a very rare close friend or a member of your immediate family. When favors are asked, assume that they would not ask unless they have an absolute need for the favor, and that you are the only person who can help them. Assume also that they will, like a close brother, be willing to "save your life" if this is ever necessary.

Do not be afraid of "what labor may demand" of the college. (In most instances, you can safely promise them the entire university; once they see what it is, they won't want it). Within the labor community it is much easier to do a favor than to ask for a favor. The painful truth of the matter is that there's very little on campus (as most campuses exist) which unions need, want, or can use.

5. Don't compete with other programs in unions or other colleges. Emphasize the degree program in arts and sciences and the last tweleve hours for specializing if students wish.

6. Use the "handshake" approach to union contacts. According to one sociologist, you can reach anybody in America with a given message with three-and-a-half handshakes. Someone you know knows someone who knows someone who has the confidence of the man or woman you want to talk to. Get to the person who has the union leader's confidence. Sell him and get him to make a call and sell the union leader on talking to you. Then and only then do you make a telephone call and make an appointment to make a presentation. Once inside the office, you're on your own. You have twenty, no more than thirty minutes to sell the program, to sell yourself and your integrity. Do a good job and things will happen.

7. Get to know everyone informally. Know little things about them. Take an interest in sceretaries and office help. Treat the help as important. The labor people in a given local often hang out in bars close to the hall and regularly have lunch in a favorite restaurant. Know them. Eat and drink there so that chance meetings can occur

8. Attend conferences and delegate meetings where labor leaders assemble.

   a. You get to know them better.

   b. You can often make short presentations. No more than 30 minutes in any meeting.

9. No surprises. Keep everybody informed. Send copies of letters to everyone. Send informative letters to people before you do anything. Always ask, "Will it give you any problems if ..."

10. Don't be too christian (accept all charity). Take advantage of all they offer. If they offer to do anything, they have a motive for offering. When it comes to the bottom line, there's only one way for a college to reach union people -- do it their way.

SUMMARY COMMENT

When you work with the union leadership, always remember that you're dealing with "natural leaders." Don't try to "snow them" or outsmart them. In the political arena you are no match for them. Your relationship to them must be open, straight-forward and honest. Basically, you are one of the "soldiers" in the labor movement that is going to make it look good. By the same token, you also are a threat to their career. If your program makes them look bad in the eyes of their peers or membership, their careers as union leaders may be ruined. The amount of effort they put into the program will be in direct proportion to the amount of trust they have in you to deliver what they need.

They understand that the labor movement not only has enemies but that some of those enemies might be alive, well, and working for the college. They understand that a labor-biased, labor-oriented curriculum will have some troubles. They understand that some of the college faculty members, administrators, and members of Boards of Trustees may attempt and even be successful in corrupting or destroying a program which truly serves labor's interests. No one will mind, if you fail for the right reasons, but they will mind if you succeed for all the wrong reasons.

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